

VICTORY FOR MOKAUEA FISHERMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES

JOHN KELLY

Uncle Joe Kuhiiki lived on Mokauea Island on and off since 1924. He knows the clear waters, plenty mullet, squid, lobster and limu. "That's a good place for fishing," says Uncle Joe. "Some families lived on the island you can see the valleys--Moanalua, Kalihi, Nuuanu," he told us. "Our people come visit the island. They bring taro, breadfruit, sweet potato for us fishermen. Stay a few days on the island. We catch fish. When our mauka families go home, they take fish. Hawaiian long before...like our ancestors."

Then came Dillingham's dredges in the 1930's. Most of Keehi Lagoon was destroyed. Many large fishponds were filled in with coral. "They dredged from our fishing reefs," Uncle Joe said. "Just like now, Dillingham wants to kill two miles of our fishing reef for the airport reef runway."

Dillingham gets over \$70 million from people's taxes to destroy Hawaiian reefs.

What is the reef runway for? The State says to make less airplane noise at Kalihi. The real reason is for more tourists. Last year, 3 million tourists came here. By 1990, they plan to bring 15 million tourists each year. Guys get plenty rich. Local people lose their land and sea.

So State officials wanted to get the fishermen who lived many years on the island. They called them squatters. They charged them with "trespassing on State land."

The fishermen said, "We're not squatting on State land--the State is squatting on Hawaiian land!" The U.S. stole it with guns back then (in 1898) when they arrested and imprisoned Queen Liliuokalani. Dillingham's father was part of the businessmen's conspiracy to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy.

Then on June 6, 1975, the State sent their people to Mokauea Island with dynamite and matches.

"They burned down five of our homes," says Ethel Kilaulani Dickens, Mokauea Fishermen's Association secretary. "They burned our fishnets and belongings inside." Ethel is the Mokauea Fishermen's Association secretary.

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All that unity made the State turn around. Gov. Ariyoshi wrote a letter to the fishermen. "Open negotiations," he proposed. They did.

On January 14, 1977, a year and a half after the State burned the island, the State Land Board, with the recommendation of Gov. Ariyoshi, voted to give the Mokauea Fishermen's Association a 65-year lease of the island. The rent is very low, what they can afford.

What now? The fishermen have all kind of good plans--make a fish processing plant, grow food and keep the fishing village alive, something like in old times.

"We sure feeling good now!" says Uncle Joe.